

## The Mercy of God Almighty, Part 2 - Romans 9:6-9 - July 15<sup>th</sup>, 2012

- Today's teaching will be part two of a new series we began last week titled; "The Mercy of God Almighty."
- In the first five verses, we were able to answer two very big questions the first of which was, how is it that I, like Paul, can have a heart for the lost.
- The second big question we were able to answer was how can I love someone who hates my guts. Now, we're going to answer another big one.

### How can I know if I'm a true Christian? (Verses 6-9)

(6) It is not as though God's word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. (7) Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children. On the contrary, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." (8) In other words, it is not the natural children who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring. (9) For this was how the promise was stated: "At the appointed time I will return, and Sarah will have a son."

- v6-7 Paul says God's Word hasn't failed. Not all Israel's descendants are Israel, nor are all Abraham's children, on the contrary, it's through Isaac.
- v8 He says that it's not the natural children who are God's children, but it's the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring.
- v9 He reiterates this promise by quoting Genesis 18:14 and how at the appointed time, the Lord would return, and that Sarah would have a son.

- In order to better understand why Paul says what he says the way he says it, one must first be privy to the backstory as to what's going on here.
- Paul has sort of been defending himself against the accusations as a Jew, of being a traitor to the Jew, if there are no advantages for the Jew.
- In other words, God's Word must have failed if not all who have the privileges as and of the people of God really belong to all the people of God.

- Maybe better said, just because one descended from Israel doesn't necessarily mean that they are Israel. Not all Abraham's children are Jews.
- On the contrary, though Abraham had two offspring, Ishmael and Isaac, it would only be recognized through Isaac that the promise would come.
- This then becomes the litmus test as to whether or not one was a true Jew or not. Was their birth from the flesh/Ishmael, or from the Spirit/Isaac?

- This is why Paul ever so beautifully and brilliantly illustrates it by bringing Abraham into the narrative. You might say that he's got their attention.
- They knew that as a Jew they were the descendants of Isaac and not Ishmael, and so too did they know that Isaac was the promised offspring.
- The problem is that they fancied themselves as being entitled to this promise simply because they were the natural born descendants of Isaac.

- To say that what Paul writes here would've been explosive and even scandalous to this Jewish thought is a gross understatement to say the least.
- Just as they needed to be descendants of Isaac, the second birth of a son to Abraham, so too do they need the second birth from the Son of God.
- Here's how I get there, Isaac isn't merely an illustration theoretically he also provides us a powerful application practically. We saw this in Joshua.

- Joshua 15 painted a picture of Caleb as a type of the Holy Spirit; Joshua 16 painted a picture of Manasseh and Ephraim as a type of the 2<sup>nd</sup> birth.
- Joseph had two sons, Manasseh the firstborn but Ephraim was greater as the second born, which is why he received the blessing, not his brother.
- Ephraim as the second born son is a picture of the second birth when we as believers are born again of the Spirit of God, and that is the greater.

- We see this dynamic throughout scripture with the likes of Cain as the firstborn and Abel as the second born. It would be Abel who was blessed.
- Fast-forward the Biblical clock to Ishmael as Abraham's firstborn son by Hagar, (flesh) and Isaac, Abraham's second born son to Sarah, (Spirit).
- Then you even have Aaron, the firstborn son of Amram and Jochbed, but it would be the second born son Moses who would be the deliverer.

- Along with Cain and Abel, Manasseh and Ephraim, Ishmael and Isaac, and Moses and Aaron there's Esau and Jacob, which Paul brings up next.
- With Ishmael and Isaac, it's the second birth, but with Jacob and Esau, not only is it the second birth, it's the rejection of that born again birth right.
- Lord willing, we'll be studying this next week commencing with verse ten where we will enter into a very difficult text dealing with God hating Esau.

- Be that as it may, and suffice it to say, we still have an unanswered question on the table, for which we need to provide a correct Biblical answer.
- The question is how can I know whether or not I am a true Christian? The answer? You are only a true Christian if you're born again of the Spirit.
- Being born into a Christian home doesn't make you a Christian, just as being born in a garage doesn't make you a car. Sorry for the silly analogy!

- Our first birth of the flesh is like Ishmael naturally, but we need that second birth when we're born again of the Spirit like Isaac, supernaturally.
- Now, this brings up an even bigger question of how to know whether or not someone is born again or not. I think I'd be remiss to not address this.
- At the risk of an oversimplification, I'm going to borrow heavily from my wife's and my experience when our children were born. I was at their birth!

- The reality of our newborn was brought home when we brought them home. Let's just say, there was no doubt that this child was a "new-birth!"
- It was evidenced by how often our little bundle of joy craved mommy's milk. If baby didn't get milk, we knew that once again, we didn't get sleep.
- Then there was the teething just in time for the weaning, which was just in time for the eating of the bread and meat to chew with those new teeth.

- Then our little bundle of joy wasn't so little any more, they begin to grow, and crawl, no longer are they toddlers, so we had to child-lock our home.
- Then, as they continued to eat, sleep and cry, not necessarily in that order, they began to walk, then run, then fall, then get lumps on their heads.
- It's at this point that every parent longs for their child to grow up fast only to wish once they do, that they didn't have to grow up as fast as they did.

- Here's my point, and yes I do have a point, just as a newborn craves milk, so too do we as newborns in Christ crave the milk of the Word of God.
- I will know for a certainty that I, or someone I know, is born again by how much they crave the Word of God, the things of God, the people of God.
- Furthermore, I will know whether or not one is born again by how they grow and go from crawling to walking, to stumbling to falling in their walk.

- Let me round a quick corner in closing and share with you something else that's not so easily visible in the text related to both Ishmael and Isaac.
- Here's what I'm thinking, as we grow and mature in our Christian walk, we will begin to walk in the Spirit/Isaac, and not fulfill the lusts of the flesh.
- Yes we may stumble and fall as born again Christians, but like with the child who learns to walk then run, so too do we walk, then run the race.

- One final thought, we as born again Christians can birth an Ishmael when we operate in the flesh as opposed to walking in the Spirit. Here's how:
- If I'm not in step with the Spirit, and feeding the Spirit, and not depriving the flesh, then by default, I will find myself becoming a carnal Christian.
- Conversely, if I'm busy in the Spirit, I won't have time for the flesh. If I'm feeding the Spirit, I won't have time to feed the flesh, thus it is starved.